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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 3019
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 2901
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 2347
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 4692
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 6134
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 000308

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JAPAN-CHINA JOINT HISTORY COMMISSION TRYING TO
OVERCOME DELAYS

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Classified By: CDA James P. Zumwalt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY The Japan-China Joint Historical Research Committee, formed in October 2006, is aiming for a March 2009 release of its long awaited report, despite last-minute Chinese misgivings about language contained therein. The Committee initially sought to complete the project by Summer 2008 but had to delay its release after the Chinese side voiced preferences for a more "cautious" treatment of certain unspecified historical events. Japan's Committee chair, Shinichi Kitaoka, would not elaborate on the points of contention when he met Embassy political officers February 2 but raised suspicions about the influence of Chinese nationalism and the role of the Chinese Government in the supposedly independent research entity. The goal of the Committee remains the same: To develop an objective understanding of events between Japan and China and to foster mutual understanding even if both sides ultimately "agree to disagree" on their interpretations of history. Providing his perspective on overall Japan-China relations, our interlocutor said that Japan must be more proactive on security policy issues. He also noted that members of Japan's main opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan, are split between supporters of the PRC and those of Taiwan.
END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Japan and China agreed in October 2006 to establish the Japan-China Joint Historical Research Committee with the aim of developing an objective understanding about the history between Japan and China. The Committee, which consists of ten prominent academics and other representatives from Japan and the PRC, has met as a whole three times since December 2006; the most recent Committee meeting was January ¶2008. Tokyo University professor and Japanese Committee chair Shinichi Kitaoka has met his direct Chinese counterpart frequently since then. The Committee will produce a two-volume report containing Japanese and Chinese explanations of the same discrete historical periods. The first volume will include eight chapters -- eight essays from each country -- on ancient history. The second volume will

comprise nine chapters -- nine essays from each side -- on modern history. The publication will close with summaries and appendices on differences in historical interpretation.

¶3. (C) Chinese concerns about language have delayed publication until this March, Kitaoka told Embassy Tokyo February 2. The Committee had originally hoped to publish the report "quietly" in summer 2008 during the 30th anniversary of the normalization of relations and just before the Beijing Olympics. The Committee had seemed to be heading in that direction, but Chinese counterparts in July 2008 wanted to "change the plan," claimed Kitaoka. The PRC is "okay" with the general outcome of the research but is expressing dissatisfaction with language. Although Kitaoka demurred on specifics, he hinted that Japanese descriptions of modern history remain a sticking point with the Chinese side. Chinese participants prefer wording that is more moderate and "cautious." Although both sides left open the possibility of adjusting language to retain the meaning of the events in question, Kitaoka stressed that the sudden change was "one-sided" and was a "breach of promise." Japan, for its part, made no such demands. "History is history, after all," Kitaoka noted.

¶4. (C) Both sides are also trying to overcome additional sticking points. Kitaoka said that Chinese panelists had initially been reluctant to include post-World War II history in the project's scope because they wanted to avoid domestic Chinese political discussions. However, the Japanese academics successfully argued that inclusion of domestic political events, such as the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, was critical to the credibility of the report. The

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Japanese have pressed to include postwar history in the second volume because the country's peaceful development and economic recovery over the past 60 years are necessary counterpoints to the country's wartime and pre-war history, asserted Kitaoka.

¶5. (C) Chinese nationalism seems to be the root cause of the delay, Kitaoka continued. He expressed uncertainty about the provenance of the Chinese academics -- many of whom are "not professional historians" -- and noted that they are in the difficult position of having to take orders from Beijing. Kitaoka admitted that Chinese opinion and "nationalistic" sentiment are more "volatile" than he had expected and are difficult to manage. The same strain of nationalism has slowed discussions on joint research and development in the East China Sea since Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Japan in May 2008 and is a potential brake on joint disaster prevention efforts, particularly discussions on the role and involvement of Japan's Self Defense Forces, he explained. Lack of confidence among Chinese leaders and the absence of democracy feed such tendencies, he added.

¶6. (C) Although frustrated, Kitaoka's team is guardedly optimistic. The Committee is aiming for "compromise" and to "shrink the gaps." The differences between the two parties are actually not too big, and both sides can ultimately "agree to disagree." Kitaoka, however, appeared clearly exasperated and said that he was "fed up" with the latest delays as his Chinese counterparts await final instructions from Beijing.

KITAOKA ON SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY

¶7. (C) Speaking less as an historian and more as a politically engaged intellectual, Kitaoka stressed that Japan has some "catching up" to do and that national leaders must do their security "homework." The sudden resignation of then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 slowed momentum on security-related issues such as creating a U.S.-like National

Security Council, one of Kitaoka's pet issues aimed toward streamlining Japan's executive decisionmaking structure. Japan must overcome its information stovepiping and bureaucratic rivalries that plague the policymaking process and start making bold decisions, he declared.

18. (C) Japan should play to its traditional policy strengths -- economic assistance to Africa, and climate change issues -- Kitaoka argued. "Cosmetic policies" matter little, Kitaoka noted; it is time to consider more robust initiatives, such as current efforts to send Japanese anti-piracy assets to the Horn of Africa (HOA). Beijing's relatively quick HOA dispatch as well as the recent announcement on intentions to build two aircraft carriers serve to augment China's blue-water navy capabilities, Kitaoka asserted. China is trying to prove that it can be a "responsible stakeholder." These ambitions, however, provide little insight into China's "grand strategy" and still leave China observers wondering about Beijing's true intentions.

19. (C) Touching on China views among opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) members, Kitaoka said that most DPJ politicians are "pro-China," but the party includes many notable Taiwan supporters, such as female Diet member and ethnic Chinese Ren Ho and former party President Seiji Maehara. We are seeing "strange" policy comments from the DPJ now, but the party will probably adopt more practical positions if it assumes power after a Lower House election. The wildcard remains current party President Ichiro Ozawa, who is widely viewed within the party as a friend of China.

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ZUMWALT